

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 QUITO 04098 01 OF 02 170235Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
PC-01 AID-05 /074 W
-----114244 170315Z /20

R 162008Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8530
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 4098

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL STUMBLES WHILE CAMPAIGN
PICKS UP STEAM

REF: QUITO 4037

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL IS DEMONSTRATING INCREASING INCOMPETENCE IN MANAGING THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF HAS INTENSIFIED IN RECENT DAYS. CANDIDATES ARE MORE ACTIVE BOTH ON THE STUMP AND, IN SOME CASES, IN THE MEDIA. PERSONAL INVECTIVE AND EVEN VIOLENCE HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR ALTHOUGH IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY THAT THE LATTER WILL BECOME A MAJOR CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL'S (SET) ACTION IN DISQUALIFYING ASSAD BUCARAM'S CANDIDACY FOR VICE-MAYOR OF GUAYAQUIL (REFTEL) MAY BE UNDERSTOOD IN TERMS OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUED ANTIPATHY TOWARD BUCARAM; BUT LESS UNDERSTANDABLE, ALTHOUGH JUST AS IMPORTANT, IS THE INCREASING EVIDENCE OF A TOTAL LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM -- AND EVEN ABILITY TO ADEQUATELY PERFORM ITS JOB -- THAT SEEMS TO AFFLICT THE SET. THE GROUP HAS SUFFERED FROM THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 QUITO 04098 01 OF 02 170235Z

DEFECTION OF MOST OF ITS PROMINENT MEMBERS IN PROTEST OVER ACTIONS OF THE GOE OR THE SET ITSELF IN DETERMINING THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION. AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED, IT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ABLE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH SOME OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS STILL PLAGUING THE PROCESS.

3. ONE MAJOR PROBLEM IS THE PROBLEM OF LIMITED NUMBERS

OF TABLES AT VOTING SITES. THE SET ITSELF ESTIMATES THAT EACH VOTING TABLE WILL HAVE TO HANDLE SOME 500 VOTERS. THIS LEAVES LESS THAN TWO MINUTES FOR EACH VOTER TO DEAL WITH A COMPLICATED SET OF FIVE BALLOTS, GIVEN THE HOURS THE TABLES WILL BE OPEN. WHEN QUERIED RECENTLY AS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPANDING THE NUMBER OF TABLES FOR THE ELECTION, SET SPOKESMEN REPLIED THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO DO SO SINCE NUMBERS AND WORK ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE TABLES HAVE ALREADY BEEN ISSUED. SIMILARLY, THE SET HAS BEEN UNABLE TO COME UP WITH ANY SPECIFIC ANSWER ON WHEN THE SECOND ROUND OF ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD OR THE INAUGURATION TAKE PLACE; AND ACERBIC COMMENTATORS ARE NOW ASKING WHY COLOMBIA COULD ACCOMPLISH ITS BALLOT REVIEW AND CHALLENGE PROCESS IN ONE WEEK, WHILE SOME HOLD THAT ECUADOR NEEDS TWO TO THREE MONTHS. ADDING TO THE CONFUSION WAS THE "PERSONAL" OPINION EXPRESSED ON TELEVISION BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF SET THAT THE INAUGURATION COULD NOT POSSIBLE TAKE PLACE UNTIL JANUARY 1978. (ADMIRAL POVEDA HAS CONFIDED TO US ON TWO DIFFERENT OCCASIONS THAT THE GOE IS AIMING FOR A DECEMBER 6 DATE, BUT AT ANY RATE WILL FULFILL ITS PROMISE OF SURRENDERING POWER WITHIN THIS YEAR).

4. AT WORK HERE IS A KIND OF BUREAUCRATIC INDIFFERENCE ON THE PART OF THE SET TO THE SPIRIT OF THE PROCESS. THIS KIND OF AN ATTITUDE IS NOT ATYPICAL OF ECUADOREAN BUREAUCRATS IN GENERAL, BUT IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT IT SHOULD INFECT THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 04098 01 OF 02 170235Z

SET. NOR CAN IT BE ASCRIBED TO GOE MEDDLING WITH THE PROCESS. ALTHOUGH THE GOE HAS MEDDLED WITH THE GOAL OF PRODUCING MINIMALLY ACCEPTABLE CANDIDATES, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE GOE INTENDS TO MANIPULATE THE ELECTION MECHANICS PROPER. NEVERTHELESS, THE SET'S ROLE AND ACTIONS THUS FAR HAVE ROBBED IT OF RESPECT AND CREDIBILITY. SHOULD THE RESULTS BE CLOSE, THIS PERCEPTION COULD HAVE UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES.

5. MEANWHILE, BOTH THE HEAT OF CAMPAIGN RHETORIC AND THE TEMPO OF THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF HAVE BEGUN TO INCREASE MARKEDLY DURING THE PAST WEEK. MOST NOTABLE FOR HIS ACTIVITY IS RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA. HUERTA'S CAMPAIGN MANAGERS HAD PRESCRIBED A MEDIA-BLITZ CAMPAIGN WHICH WOULD ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME THE CANDIDATE'S LATE START WHILE PORTOCCTING HIM FROM THE RIGORS OF A STUMP CAMPAIGN, PARTICULARLY IN THE ALTITUDE. THERE MUST, HOWEVER, BE CONCERN IN HUERTA'S CAMP THAT THIS STRATEGY IS NOT SUFFICIENT, AT LEAST IN THE SIERRA, BECAUSE RAUL CLEMENTE HAS EMBARKED ON AN UNEXPECTEDLY INTENSIVE PERSONAL APPEARANCE CAMPAIGN THE LENGTH OF THE SIERRA. HE JUST FINISHED A TRIP SOUTH TO LOJA AND CUENCA AND IS NOW IN TULCAN, IN THE NORTH,

WHERE HE WILL BEGIN A SWING SOUTH THROUGH QUITO AND RIOBAMBA. RAUL CLEMENTE IS NOT YOUNG AND REPORTEDLY DOES NOT LIKE THE ALTITUDE, SO HIS ADVISORS MUST HAVE BEEN FAIRLY CONCERNED TO CONVINCE HIM THAT SUCH A TRIP WAS NECESSARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 QUITO 04098 02 OF 02 170223Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
AID-05 PC-01 /074 W
-----114061 170329Z /20

R 162008Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8531
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 4098

6. SIXTO DURAN AND RODRIGO BORJA ALSO MADE LOJA APPEARANCES DURING THE PAST WEEK, DURING WHICH THE UGLY SPECTRE OF CAMPAIGNING-CONNECTED VIOLENCE APPEARED. A BORJA RALLY WAS BROKEN UP BY ROCK-THROWING YOUTHS ON JUNE 10, AND BORJA HIMSELF REPORTEDLY WAS STRUCK ON THE HEAD BY A ROCK. ON JUNE 11 FIGHTING BROKE OUT BETWEEN SIXTO SUPPORTERS AND GROUPS OF YOUTH IN BOTH CARIAMANGO AND LOJA. IN THE ENSUING MELEES AND POLICE TEAR GAS BARRAGES, THREE PEOPLE WERE SHOT AND WOUNDED. IN BOTH CASES THE DISRUPTIONS WERE APPARENTLY CAUSED BY SUPPORTERS OF THE POPULAR DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (MPD), THE PEKING-LINE COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION WHICH HAD NOMINATED CAMILO MENA AS ITS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND, UPON HIS DISQUALIFICATION, ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS. SOME VIOLENCE ALSO OCCURRED IN GUAYAQUIL IN THE WAKE OF THE DISQUALIFICATION OF ASSAD BUCARAM'S VICE-MAYOR CANDIDACY. THE HOME OF HIS MAJOR OPPONENT MIGUEL SALEM WAS ATTACKED BY A GANG ON JUNE 13 WHICH BROKE WINDOWS AND DID OTHER DAMAGE. THE GUAYAQUIL LIBERAL HEADQUARTERS WAS ALSO FIRED ON THE SAME NIGHT. NO INJURIES WERE REPORTED.

7. CAMPAIGN RHETORIC HAS ALSO TAKEN A MORE TROPICAL TURN. RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RECENTLY DESCRIBED HIMSELF IN A SPEECH AS "AN OLD FIGHTING COCK". WHO COULDN'T BE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 QUITO 04098 02 OF 02 170223Z

KEPT FROM THE FIELD OF BATTLE. SIXTO DURAN, IN AN OUTBURST UNCHARACTERISTIC OF HIS GENERALLY NON-CONFRONTATIONAL MANNER TOWARD HIS OPPONENTS, WAS QUOTED IN THE PRESS AS TELLING THE CROWD IN LOJA ON JUNE 11 THAT TALK OF "NEW DEMOCRACY" OR "LEFTIST DEMOCRACY" IS IN REALITY "THE SAME OLD FARCE." THIS COMMENT REFERS EQUALLY WELL TO HUERTA, WHO HAS PROMISED A "NEW DEMOCRACY" AND BORJA WHO, OF COURSE, PROMISES A LEFTIST BUT DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE. ACCUSATIONS THAT ONE CANDIDATE OR ANOTHER IS "SOFT" ON THE MILITARY CONTINUE TO RECEIVE PROMINENT ATTENTION.

8. THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN HAS PRODUCED NO MAJOR SURPRISES RECENTLY. THE HIGH LEVEL OF FINANCING ENJOYED BY HUERTA AND DURAN CONTINUES TO BE DEMONSTRATED BY THE HALF AND FULL-PAGE NEWSPAPER ADS AND SPOT TELEVISION COMMERCIALS. CANDIDATE CONFRONTATIONS ON PUBLIC SERVICE RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS GENERALLY PRODUCE POLITE SPARRING SESSIONS RATHER THAN SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF ISSUES. HUERTA SEEMS TO HAVE CUT BACK ON THE EXPENSIVE, TEN MINUTE TO HALF HOUR PRIME TIME SLOTS SEEN EARLIER IN THE CAMPAIGN. ON THE OTHER HAND THE CFP HAS BOUGHT ITS SECOND HALF-HOUR OF EVENING TELEVISION TIME SO FAR DURING THE CAMPAIGN FOR A JUNE 14 APPEARANCE BY JAIME ROLDOS AND OSWALDO HURTADO. BORJA, MEANSHILE, IS ESCHEWING TELEVISION AND PLANS TO STAY IN GUAYAQUIL FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS AND CONCENTRATE ON IMPROVING HIS LAGGING SITUATION THERE.

9. COMMENT: WITH ONE MONTH TO GO, THE PROSPECT IS FOR AN INCREASINGLY CONFRONTATIONAL CAMPAIGN. WITH LITTLE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM ON THE ISSUES, CANDIDATES ARE LIKELY TO TURN TO MUD-SLINGING AND PERSONAL ATTACKS IN ORDER TO ATTRACT SUPPORT. THE FIRST GLIMPSES OF CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE ARE A MATTER FOR CONCERN, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT AT ALL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 04098 02 OF 02 170223Z

CERTAIN THAT THIS WILL BECOME A RECURRING PATTERN. THE EXTREME (PEKING-LINE) LEFT, WHILE NOT A FACTOR IN ECUADOREAN POLITICS AND PROBABLY JUSTIFIABLY DISQUALIFIED FROM THE CAMPAIGN, HAS THE CAPACITY IN ALL MAJOR CITIES TO DISRUPT CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES. IN ADDITION, THE CFP IS LIKELY TO GET ROUGHER IN GUAYAQUIL. REACTION TO EARLY INCIDENTS, HOWEVER, INDICATES THAT THE GOE IS NOT ABOUT TO LET SUCH DISRUPTION GET OUT OF HAND.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUITO04098
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780253-0320
Format: TEL
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780650/aaaabras.tel
Line Count: 224
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e4c85087-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 QUITO 4037
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2320805
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL STUMBLES WHILE CAMPAIGN PICKS UP STEAM
TAGS: PINT, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e4c85087-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014